

# THE MATTER OF FUTURE HERITAGE

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# **The Matter of Future Heritage**

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## Values of immateriality A housing typology as social and mobile element in the urban context of Buenos Aires

Live Space; Collective Memory; Active Heritage

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To think of heritage in a different and future oriented way, the actual use, the everyday life within the building, its possibilities to transform and the social value as inscription of a present society production have to be reflected not only from the planners side but also from the users perspective and have to be communicated in different ways. In this paper three characteristic aspects of heritage – 1. Patina as reference to the material , 2. The immobile cultural vehicle, and 3. Collective memory as base are set into relation to the case study of the casa chorizo, which is part of a larger research framework on design paradigms for Lived Spaces as urban practice. The casa chorizo as popular housing typology in Buenos Aires (Argentina) due to its adaptability has come to be a space of continuous change, reflected connections and inscription of users that can be an exemplary case within the future reflection on matters of heritage and the understanding of Lived Spaces.

## Heritage and its Patina

Heritage lets us—as architects and urban designers—think of buildings in first place—built structures belonging to a certain time or society and objects that as monuments give importance to the city. The material description of spaces often leads to a determination in old and new, before and after, refurbished, transformed and renovated or abandoned. What is spoken of is a specific state of a space, but rarely the process related to time and memory laying in between<sup>1</sup> the way how these spaces are adapted, what has formed them how and what importance the change has for the todays understanding of society – overall its socio-cultural meaning.

Spaces that in the present can show such a process can be seen as “lived spaces” - they have already experienced several kinds of uses and keep on being transformed. They show different layers of usage and spatial change and often function as collective memory for people – a social connection. After Lefebvre the idea of Lived Space is connected to a subjective perception of space, one lying in-between space of thought and the already lived – a space of expression and a significance through practice and use. It is an atmosphere understood through a sensual experience or feeling and the immaterial connection of people to space. Lived space means the social space as habitat characterized by humans. It is a never-ending entity under constant transformation of built and social elements. Space that due to its history, the different uses already taken place, their material changes and the patina of the place transmits the atmosphere of an already inhabited space where people feel attached to<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Michael Guggenheim “Building memory: Architecture, networks and users”. *Memory Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 40

2 Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*. (Paris: Anthropos. Translation and Précis, 1974)



We have to learn to read this patina of spaces, the continuous material inscription that tells of its uses<sup>3</sup>– the colour, broken parts in the walls, stucked half ripped of papers and growing plants. As materialized time we can approach them as a person, capture an impression at first sight and discover it layer by layer. To the material appearance, the haptic and visual experience we can add a nonmaterial, sensual and atmospherical impression that is captured when being in situ and moving through the space<sup>4</sup>.

In the discussion about future architectural research the need to communicate architecture in a different way is just one issue. Jeremy Till here mentions especially the two necessary con-

3 Momoyo Kaijima; Laurent Stalder; Yu Iseki, *Architectural Ethnography - Japanese Pavilion Venice Biennale 2018*. (Nogizaka: Toto Verlag, 2018)

4 Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures. The Aesthetics of felt spaces*. (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017) , Saskia Herbert, *Lived Space Lichtenberg #1*. (Berlin : Universität der Künste, 2014) and Benjamin, Walter. "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in: Adorno, Theodor. *Walter Benjamin: Schriften no.1*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1955)

Fig. 1

Patina | Riccarda Cappeller 2014

texts for the production of architectural research: academy and practice, which both have to be considered. Also we have to overcome the addressing of only the academic community as well as research undertaken only for commercial reasons, "not shared with the rest of the community"<sup>5</sup>. Making buildings speak and allow them to tell their process through the interaction of social, cultural and economic ideas that form them could be one approach towards a different exchange with a more coherent strategy.

### **Cultural vehicle and Collective memory**

To focus on Lived Spaces and monuments of the city again is necessary because they hold the city together, create a network of spaces of experience that is fundamental for a functioning urban space and forms part of its culture. The history of a space, that through the change of use transforms into memory is important for invention, because together with the site, an event and signs it works as characteristics of urban artefacts and transmits an identity - the soul of the city<sup>6</sup>. Heritage sites with their lived time-space today could be used more often as points of intersection – social spaces within the fragmented urban space that are accessible for everybody and function for unfolding creative production instead of being only spaces of nostalgia. On the one hand this refers to a different, a "reflective understanding" of nostalgia, which allows a more dynamic view of memory connected to the mediation of history and passage of time<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand it means to not only look to the historical facts of a space but also to include the present day to day interactions

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5 Jeremy Till, *What is architectural research? Architectural Research: Three Myths And One Model.* (London: Riba, 2007)

6 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the city.* Cambridge, (London: MIT Press, 1966)

7 Svetlana, Boym, *The future of nostalgia.* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 53-54

of people in space<sup>8</sup>. “To receive and transmit a legacy is not enough; it must be refurbished and given new resonance while in our care” states Lowenthal<sup>9</sup> and with this makes clear the necessity of an active heritage production that is not only bond to the past and nostalgia.

Etymologically heritage means Leftovers – material or nonmaterial things our ancestors have left for us when imagining a future from their point of view. This generational perspective that is connected to the interchange of space, time and people manifesting within, underlines heritage as socio-spatial aspect with a cultural capacity that provokes change. It is a process in movement and has to be represented as such<sup>10</sup>. Like a time capsule it can transport concepts, ideas and images, an immaterial value of a specific place in a specific time and society. It is a cultural vehicle<sup>11</sup> and representation of time that through the history they contain and the stories they tell, – the collective memory – lets them work as social connectors, making people remember, recognize and take attachment to the space they live in. For example Cortazar in his short story “casa tomada” (engl. taken house) doesn’t start with a description of the actual house, but with a thought and feeling connected to it. “We liked the house because apart from its spaciousness and antiquity (today old houses succumbed to the more advantageous sale of their materials) it kept the memories of our great grandparents, our paternal grandfather, our parents and our childhood.”<sup>12</sup>. What he transmits in first place is the feeling of a “Home” connected

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8 Alan Latham, “Researching and writing Everyday accounts of the city” in *Picturing the Social Landscape*, ed. Paul Sweetman and Carolin Knowles., (London: Routledge, 2004): 119

9 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009):171

10 Sofia Nannini, “Yona Friedman. Mobile Architecture. peoples Architecture”. Histories of Post War Architecture, no. 1 (2017):1-4

11 Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, *Tense past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. (New York: Routledge, 1996)

12 Julio Cortazar, “Casa tomada” in *Contemporary Latin American Literature*, ed. Gladys Varona-Lacey (San Francisco: McGraw-Hill, 2001):157-161

to past stories. Later, with a description of the house's spaces, the reader can follow the structure of the house and its apparent flexibility, which leads to the thought, that the mentioned house could also be a casa chorizo.

### **Connection Case study**

"In the art of architecture the house is what best characterizes the habits, people and uses of a town."<sup>13</sup> According to Viollet le Duc if we want to talk about the socio-spatial aspects of the urban, we have to focus on the houses – everyday architectures and culturally spread typologies. The casa chorizo as a conceptual idea and typology is remembered by many. It is a Lived Space and popular urban habitat that through its different users tells of a social type under transformation.

The typology of the casa chorizo, a patio house, was brought to Argentina by European immigrants and spread as simple structure reacting to the narrow properties of Buenos Aires. It creates flexible and lively situations opening up to the city context and its original idea works as open and people connecting home and popular urban habitat that can be transformed according to the needs and habits of the users. The simple structure combines outside and inside spaces, private and public spheres and a quiet, but communicative and often green refuge within the density of the city. It allows flexible adaptions to private uses or public events, a huge variety of living situations and solutions to new demands for shared spaces within the city. Looking at several examples the story of the city, its cultural background and directions of the society can be told by the habitants and users of the houses.

To make buildings speak and let these perspectives become part of the research, interviews and documentary footage are

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13 Eugene Emmanuel Viollet le Duc in Roberto De Gregorio, *La casa criolla. Popularmente llamada casa chorizo.* (Nobuko: Buenos Aires, 2003)



combined with found literature, theoretical texts and archival material. The user related transformations of the casa chorizo over the time is set into a broader context of the city expansion and connected to the concept of mobile architectures – not the static and material idea of built assets, but the travelled concept, the ongoing improvisation within a set frame and the changing user groups that continuously question the future idea for these habitats.

Fig. 2

Casas chorizo  
Riccarda Cappeller  
2014

The narration of users and inhabitants on several spaces of the same kind, capture the main spatial ideas as well as the



socio-cultural background. As parts of a larger research on the casas chorizo they tell the story of a space imagined for social and highly urbanized life:

One explains the and general city structure of Buenos Aires linked to the fact that it is an european city brought up mainly by immigrants. A second tells about the conviviality and the sociable space within the casas chorizo, while a third one focuses on the development of several houses from private to a collective place full of happenings and spatial transformations. The fourth brings up the question of its future possibilities, relating a ruin to newly refurbished examples.

Fig. 2

Casas chorizo  
Riccarda Cappeller  
2014



Fig. 3  
Transformation of  
buildings told by  
users

Connected to their structural transformations over time the story of the casas chorizo can be read in very different ways and function as inspiration for a future design process. By learning from the change of use through users and their improvisation according to their needs, we re-question and re-invent space differently and might arrive to a stabilization of forms in an architectural sense<sup>14</sup>.

### Future reflection on matters of heritage

To think of heritage in a future oriented way, more than the material states of buildings, their protection and reconstruction have to be considered. Even if the spatial context and the development of a building plays a role for its classification, the actual use, the everyday life within it, the possibilities to transform and

14 Michael Guggenheim, "From Prototyping to Allotyping. The invention of change of use and the crisis of building types". *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 7, no. 4 (2014): 411-433

the social value as inscription of a present society production aren't reflected enough.

Starting from individual case studies connected to the users of the casas chorizos and their form of coexistence, heritage, like above, is understood on a more conceptual level, that integrates not only the material aspects related to time and people but also the immaterial like social connections and the collective memory. The ideas connected to the casa chorizo could be brought further, not only in the development of their buildings itself (vacant spaces, additions, change of program) but also as principals for newly designed spaces that address social exchange and flexible, process oriented ideas ideas from the beginning on.

The heritage value of the casa chorizo lays in the combination of historic, social and architectural aspects, also constituting the idea of culture as a medium for possible change. Moreover it is a collectively lived space from which we can learn for thinking, creating and producing density within our built environments. It is a starting point to learn from Lived Spaces, understand their essence and reinvent and adapt them to the needs of an already visible future.

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